

June 13, 2001

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to speak with you about Environmental Justice. It is an issue that has not received a great deal of attention, yet, impacts a great number of low income and people of color communities. Communities that historically have not had the voice that other more privileged communities have had in getting environmental issues addressed in their neighborhoods.

I've been asked to speak to you briefly about environmental hazards, their proximity to low income and people of color communities and cumulative impacts. In addition, I would like to give you a little background of the struggles that the Environmental Protection Agency has faced in the past, and to some degree, is still facing, and actions we have taken to address some of these issues.

Evidence shows that environmental pollution sources are overwhelming located in low income and people of color communities. The Duwamish River and Georgetown communities are just one example of many in the state of Washington where a high concentration of sources coincide with large populations of low income and people of color. Multiple facilities are located in low income and people of color communities with some discharging into local waters, others emitting into the ambient air, and others generating, storing and transporting hazardous chemicals. All too often, the cumulative impacts of these facilities are not being addressed in a comprehensive manner.

Historically, EPA has acted in a very 'independent' manner when administering its policies and regulations. Those in the Agency working under the Clean Air Act, focused only on those sources emitting air pollutants, or just focused on the air polluting components of a facility. Likewise, those working under the Clean Water Act, focused only on the water polluting aspects of a source. Often, neither group knew what the other was doing, or worse, how the other's decisions were impacting the communities. We acknowledge our blind sightedness and are taking steps to work with each other and address cumulative environmental impacts on communities.

In December 2000, our Office of General Counsel released a memorandum describing in detail, which components of our statutes and regulations specifically speak to Environmental Justice in our permitting programs. This is the first comprehensive assessment to present interpretations of EPA's statutory authority and regulations that are legally permissible to address permit issues in low income and people of color communities. The memorandum speaks specifically to cumulative impacts, unique exposure pathways and sensitive populations in the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, and the Safe

Drinking Water Act.

Acknowledging the need for Environmental Justice training, federal, state and local agencies, tribes, academia, industry and community groups, in a collaborative approach, are developing curriculum that is designed to provide high quality, consistent training to diverse audiences throughout the country. This will be the first time Environmental Justice curriculum will be developed with meaningful input from regulators, those being regulated and the public.

Closer to home in Region 10 EPA, we have developed tools such as a GIS application that identifies areas where significant populations of low income and people of color reside, as well as showing the locations of ALL facilities, regardless of media or programmatic jurisdiction. The application provides all Region 10 employees a comprehensive view of all sources and their juxtaposition to low income and people of color communities. Efforts are currently underway to make this application available to the public.

Region 10 EPA has established the Environmental Justice Core Group. The Core Group consists of representatives from all the Agency programs and meets on a regular basis to discuss current projects and proposed actions, in an effort to proactively identify and address issues that may disproportionately impact low income and people of color communities. The goal of the Core Group is to integrate Environmental Justice into the everyday activities of Region 10 EPA.

We are working with Washington Department of Ecology, the Washington Board of Health, and the University of Washington to learn more about the issues that most impact low income and people of color communities, and to speak to the lessons that we have learned working on Environmental Justice issues. We especially appreciate the invitation to participate on the Interagency Workgroup on Environmental Justice sessions sponsored by the Washington Board of Health, and look forward to continued involvement.

I hope this has provided you with a brief overview of some of the issues the EPA has had to contend with as it implements the Environmental Justice program both nationally and in Region 10. While it has been, and will continue to be a struggle to address disparate environmental impacts on low income and people of color communities, we believe that capacity building; communication and coordination are at the forefront of a successful program. That is why we support the proposed recommendations in the Washington State Board of Health *Proposed Final Report State Board of Health Priority: Environmental Justice*. We believe that with coordination, capacity building and communication, the guidelines you have developed can be integrated into an effective program to address the disparities discussed in the report. We offer our continued support and assistance in achieving your goals, as your goals are our goals as well.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today.

Michael Letourneau
Office for Civil Rights and Environmental Justice